

Testimony in SUPPORT of Budget Article 12 Section 12d Perinatal Doula Services
and
H5929 The Doula Reimbursement Act
Rhode Island House Committee on Finance
Wednesday April 14, 2021

To Chairperson Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Shanelle Haile and I live in Cranston, Rhode Island. I am in strong support of Budget Article 12 Section 12d and bill H5929 The Doula Reimbursement Act. This budget article and bill are crucial to improving the health and safety of pregnant individuals, particularly Black and Brown families. A doula is a nonmedical professional trained in childbirth who provides emotional, physical, and informational support to a person who is expecting, is experiencing labor, or has recently given birth. A doula's purpose is to help people have a safe, memorable, and empowering birthing experience. This bill has been crafted collaboratively by doulas, birthing families, community organizers, doula advocates, and legislators, I support a bill that reflects the ongoing input of these key stakeholders.

Doula's are important for many reasons, including but not limited to the following:

- Reduce medical spending by eliminating unnecessary procedures and avoiding complications that can occur before, during, or after birth
- Increase black maternal health by providing quality and consistent care in labor and delivery
- Reduce health disparities for Black and Brown pregnant people

Having the support of a doula would have made a difference in my previous birth experience and would likely save the lives of countless others.

After my delivery, I complained of a headache and swelling. The nursing staff at Women and Infants Hospital assured me that nothing was wrong but offered to contact my practice (OBGYN & Associates) for a checkup. No one came even after the swelling in my legs continued.

I never saw a doctor from my practice but was instead sent a student who was training to be a midwife. The student performed a cursory review of my condition and assured me that I was okay to be released. I had only been home for an hour when I started to experience another headache. Thankfully, my father-in-law, a retired OBGYN who has practiced for over 30 years, had just come in town from Kentucky that morning. He took one look at me and then took me to the emergency room.

I later learned that I had post-partum preeclampsia—dangerously high blood pressure. I was placed on seizure pads and hospitalized for the next week. My health eventually recovered but it was largely due to my father-in-law's advocacy on my behalf. It is unacceptable that I had to

rely on his knowledge and advocacy due to the negligence and dismissiveness of my healthcare team. This is not something anyone should have to experience.

As an African American woman, I feel particularly vulnerable to the disparities women of color experience in maternal care. Doulas are a great resource to alleviate the maternal mortality outcomes Black and Brown women face in Rhode Island. I certainly would not deliver another child without the care of a doula. But I particularly support this Bill because it is vital that doulas be available to all women, whether or not they can afford to pay for their care.

For this reason, I support the Doula Reimbursement Act. All birthing persons, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income, should have access to services that support healthy outcomes in childbirth.

In closing, I urge you to support Budget Article 12 Section 12d and bill H5929 The Doula Reimbursement Act.

Sincerely,

Shanelle Haile
Cranston, RI